

STATEMENT OF LOUIS S. THOMPSON, DIRECTOR, NORTHEAST CORRIDOR PROJECT,
FEDERAL RAILROAD ADMINISTRATION, BEFORE THE PUBLIC BUILDINGS AND GROUNDS
SUBCOMMITTEE OF THE HOUSE PUBLIC WORKS AND TRANSPORTATION COMMITTEE
CONCERNING THE NATIONAL VISITOR CENTER/UNION STATION COMPLEX
TUESDAY, MAY 8, 1979

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Subcommittee:

I am pleased to appear before you today in support of H.R. 3927,
a bill to amend the National Visitor Center Facilities Act of 1968.

As you know, the National Visitor Center has been an unresolved
problem for both the Congress and the Executive Branch for a number of
years. I think we are all agreed that the present physical conditions
at the Union Station complex are unsatisfactory. We are also all in
agreement that the longer-term future of Union Station must be decided
so that we can proceed to complete the unfinished work.

In 1977 the Carter Administration recommended to Congress that the
best use for the complex would be as a joint transportation terminal and
visitor center, with the emphasis on transportation functions. This
proposed change of emphasis was not intended to minimize the national
visitor center concept, but to recognize the resurgent demand for inter-
city rail passenger transportation in the Northeast Corridor. The
Administration supported legislation which would have transferred the
lease on the National Visitor Center/Union Station property to the
Secretary of Transportation for construction and operation of an expanded
rail passenger terminal in the Concourse of the Historic Building.
That bill would have had the National Park Service continue to operate
the National Visitor Center in a portion of the Historic Building under
sublease from DOT.

While H.R. 3927 does not emphasize joint visitor and passenger use of this facility as much as we might like, and although we still would prefer that DOT be the operating entity, we believe it may produce a satisfactory compromise which will substantially accomplish essential transportation goals. This bill will enable the urgently-needed structural repairs to the Historic Building to be made. It will insure completion of a 1400-car parking garage. And it will return rail processing facilities to the Concourse and enable the tracks to be extended back to the Old Building. Also, it is DOT's present intention, if this bill is enacted, to make available approximately \$23 million in Northeast Corridor Improvement Project funds for the project.

Although we support the principles of this proposed legislation, I want to express to the Subcommittee our reservations about two provisions of the bill.

First, we believe that the rigid designation of 40,000 square feet of space for railroad functions in the Concourse is inappropriate for legislation and could unnecessarily constrain the ability of both Amtrak and the Park Service to function effectively. We believe that the allocation of space in the Concourse can and will be resolved efficiently between the Department of Transportation and the Department of the Interior, together with many of the more detailed administrative issues that have to be resolved before this legislation can be implemented, including space allocation, design and construction, use of rental payments, revenues, operation and maintenance cost apportionment, and the funding and construction role of the Northeast Corridor Project. In our view these matters would be better handled through a Memorandum of Agreement between our agencies than by legislative language. We are already discussing these issues in detail, and expect agreement to

be reached in the near future, and see no insurmountable barriers to such an agreement. This agreement will, among other things, give a definition of the funding and construction rule of the Northeast Corridor Improvement Project and allocation of cost and administrative responsibility for operating the complex.

We have a similar concern about the provision in the bill which specifies that 1,200 of the 1,400 garage parking spaces be made available "only for the automobiles of visitors." As with the allocation of space in the Concourse, we believe that such a legislated limitation on the operation and use of the parking facility is inappropriate and may by its inflexibility become a burden on both agencies. There should be a reasonable and flexible mechanism for allocation of spaces between rail passengers and National Visitor Center users based on a periodic reassessment of actual and projected demand, but a quota legislated for all time is not the solution.

In conclusion, the Administration is prepared to move forward expeditiously at the direction of Congress to complete all unfinished projects at the National Visitor Center/Union Station complex. We hope, however, that the final version of the legislation will provide the Administration with sufficient latitude to create a workable solution for all who will use the facility.